



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



ZIMMERMAN NAMED NASDVA MIDWEST DISTRICT VICE

SDDVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman has been named the Midwest District Vice President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA). Officers and committee members for 2018-2019 were elected during their conference in Boston August 12-15.

As Midwest District Vice President, Zimmerman will represent Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin, while also serving on the NASDVA Executive Committee.

The NASDVA members represent all fifty states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. They are united by a common goal to make a difference in the lives of our veterans. These leaders are tasked by their respective Governors, State Boards and/or Commissions with the responsibility to address the needs of veterans regardless of age, gender, era of service, military branch or circumstance of service. They are connected by the bonds of honorable service and united by their common goal to make a positive difference in the lives of our veterans.

Topics addressed during their conference included: opioid epidemic, addiction services, housing units for military veterans program, homes for veterans, fair housing for veterans, transition, suicide prevention services, healthcare, substance use and mental health disorders, concussion research, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, Home Base, National Wounded Vet Run, Engagement Approach by Team Red, White and Blue, Vet Center programs, memorial affairs, and family caregivers.

"NASDVA meets twice a year representing the nation and territories," said Secretary Zimmerman. "It is rewarding to be a part of a national organization with a voice that influences VA and congressional leaders."

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HONORING VIETNAM VETERANS

This past weekend veterans, families, and community leaders from the Mobridge/Pollock area gathered in Mobridge to honor over 60 Vietnam Veterans. Bob Thomason, commander of Selby American Legion Post and Justin Loesch have been working on this special celebration for over a year. Bob's dream was to have a special day to honor Vietnam Veterans from Mobridge, Pollock, Selby and surrounding area.

Over 60 Vietnam Veterans were presented with a commemorative lapel pin and commemorative proclamation from President Donald Trump.

SDDVA Program Manager Erin Bultje was the keynote speaker for the celebration. Bultje encouraged all Vietnam Veterans to visit their local county or tribal veterans service officer and allow them to assist in filing a claim for them, as well as brief them on the numerous benefits that are available.

"Because you led the charge, my generation of veterans have incredible access to healthcare, education and compensation benefits through the VA," said Bultje. "My generation thanks you more than you will ever know. It is because of you – we received your's and America's handshakes and cheers coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan. You didn't let us endure what happened to you. And we are forever grateful." Bultje encouraged all veterans to share their war stories with loved ones.

SDDVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman was not able to attend the celebration but shared a taped message with these heroes.



"Thank you for your service and welcome home," said Zimmerman. "Stand Proud and let us help you with applying for your benefits." Zimmerman also encouraged the veterans to share their stories with family and friends. He said, "You fought a war that none of will ever forget and your stories are important."

Hats off to Bob Thomason and Justin Loesch for their commitment to see this ceremony through and for honoring these great heroes.

Photos courtesy of Katie Zerr—Mobridge Tribune.

GOVERNOR CALLS ON COMMUNITIES TO ENGAGE IN SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

As the number of recorded suicides in the state continues to escalate, Gov. Dennis Daugaard is calling on South Dakotans to join the fight by participating in Suicide Prevention Month in September.

"In 2017, 192 South Dakotans lost their lives by suicide. That's the highest number ever reported in our state," said Gov. Daugaard. "Suicide is preventable and we can help by starting the conversation, providing support and directing those who need help to services. We hope our schools, churches, families, and community groups will engage in the fight to save lives by leading these kinds of discussions during Suicide Prevention Month this year."

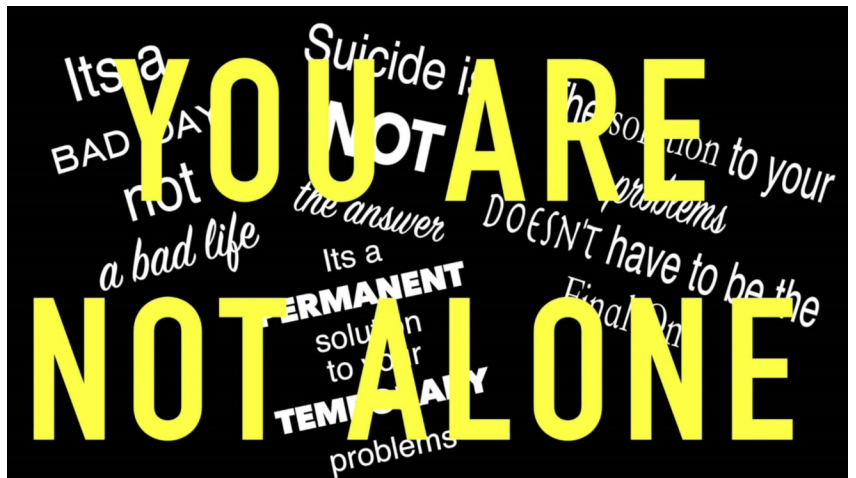
Since 2004, over 1,700 lives have been lost to suicide in South Dakota. Those numbers have increased each year, with nearly one in six high school students in South Dakota having suicidal thoughts or tendencies, according to a 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

The Governor is encouraging groups across the state to host awareness activities and promote available resources, and to add those upcoming events to the statewide calendar at [SDSuicidePreven-](#)

[tion.org](#). Groups can add scheduled activities on the website by filling out the online form under the “Events” and “Suicide Prevention Month” tabs. Local data, prevention toolkits for specific populations, and resources for survivors are also available on the website. Information specific to youth suicide prevention is located at [Bethe1SD.com](#), a campaign launched earlier this year by the Department of Social Services.

“If you are struggling or you believe someone is at risk for suicide, contact a professional immediately,” said Department of Social Services Secretary Lynne Valenti. “If you need help or you know someone who does, you can call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). People are available to help 24/7.”

Those experiencing suicidal thoughts can also obtain help by contacting any medical provider such as a family physician, psychiatrist or hospital emergency room, as well as a Community Mental Health Center or other mental health provider. For more information about behavioral health services, or to find a Community Mental Health Center, contact the Department of Social Services' Division of Behavioral Health at 605-773-3123, toll-free at 1-855-878-6057 or online at dss.sd.gov/behavioralhealth/.



VA UPDATES THE DISABILITY RATING SCHEDULE RELATED TO SKIN CONDITIONS

Effective Aug. 13, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) updated portions of the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities (VASRD, or Rating Schedule) that evaluate conditions related to the skin.

The VASRD is the collection of federal regulations used by Veterans Benefits Administration claims processors to evaluate the severity of disabilities and assign disability ratings.

The VA is in the process of updating all 15 body systems of the VASRD to reflect modern medicine more accurately and provide clearer rating decisions.

“The VA remains committed to providing veterans the benefits they have earned at the highest quality,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “With modern medicine advancing at a rapid rate, it’s important to ensure the VA’s disability rating schedule and rating decisions reflect these advancements.”

No conditions were removed from the new skin rating schedule. However, several diagnostic codes were restructured or revised. The complete list of updates to the rating schedule for skin conditions is now available

[online](#). Claims pending prior to August 13 will be considered under both the old and new rating criteria, and whichever criteria are more favorable to the veteran will be applied. Claims filed on or after August 13 will be rated under the new rating schedule.

By updating the rating schedule for skin conditions, the VA claims processors can make more consistent decisions with greater ease and ensure veterans understand these decisions.

The VA has issued several VASRD updates since September 2017, including updates for [dental and oral conditions](#), [conditions related to the endocrine system](#), [gynecological conditions and disorders of the breast and eye conditions](#).



VA ANNOUNCES LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced several leadership changes that will take effect shortly. These leadership changes will build upon a strong current team that will continue to carry out the priorities of President Trump and newly appointed Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie.

The leadership changes are as follows:

- Pamela Powers will become VA Chief of Staff. Powers is a retired Air Force Colonel and previously served with Secretary Wilkie as the Chief of Staff for the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness;
- Peter O'Rourke will become a Senior Advisor at VA. O'Rourke previously served as VA Chief of Staff, and, most recently was Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- Jacquelyn Hayes-Byrd will become Acting Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration. She was previously VA Deputy Chief of Staff, and served most recently as Acting Chief of Staff at VA.
- Chris Syrek will become VA Deputy Chief of Staff. Syrek was previously Executive Director of State and Local Government Relations, and served most recently as Acting Deputy Chief of Staff at VA.

Secretary Wilkie said, "President Dwight Eisenhower had this to say about leadership, 'You have got to have something in which to believe. You have got to have leaders, organization, friendships, and contacts that help you to believe that, and help you to put out your best,' Our veterans deserve the best, and that is what we are doing by bringing together a talented leadership team to serve them at VA."



DAY COUNTY HELPS WITH DAV FUNDRAISER

Day County VSO Kevin Bohn assisted with the A&W DAV Fundraiser in Webster last week. Small free root beer floats were given to all visitors and free will donations were collected for the DAV transportation program.

The Webster A&W raised \$1,290.09 in donations and gave away 646 free floats.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 20-24—SDDVA Benefits School—Ramkota—Pierre
 Aug 24-30—American Legion National Convention—Minneapolis, MN
 Aug 30—Veterans Day at the State Fair (Salute to Veterans 10:30 am (CT) Freedom Stage
 Sept 1—14th Annual DAV/727th Poker Run—Brookings National Guard Armory (300 5th Street S) - 10:00 am (CT)
 Sept 3—Labor Day (state offices closed)
 Sept 7—Veterans Fall Benefit Fair—Moose Lodge (516 W. 15th Avenue) - Mitchell—2:00 pm—6:00 pm (CT)
 Sept 7-9—PVA North Central Chapter Trap Shoot—Crooks Gun Club
 Sept 10—Doug Brown Memorial Pheasant Hunt—Top Gun Hunting Ranch—Howard
 Sept 11—Improving Veterans Care Conference—BHSU (4300 Cheyenne Boulevard) - Rapid City
 Sept 14—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
 Sept 21—7th Annual POW/MIA Program—Sioux Falls Veterans Memorial Park (1021 W. Bailey Street) 6:30 pm (CT)
 Sept 21—Veterans Stand Down—VFW (3601 S. Minnesota Avenue) - Sioux Falls—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 10—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—Soldiers and Sailors Building—Pierre—8:00 am (CT)
 Oct 12-13—DAV Fall Conference—DAV Dept. Headquarters (1519 W. 51st Street) - Sioux Falls
 Nov 16—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)



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